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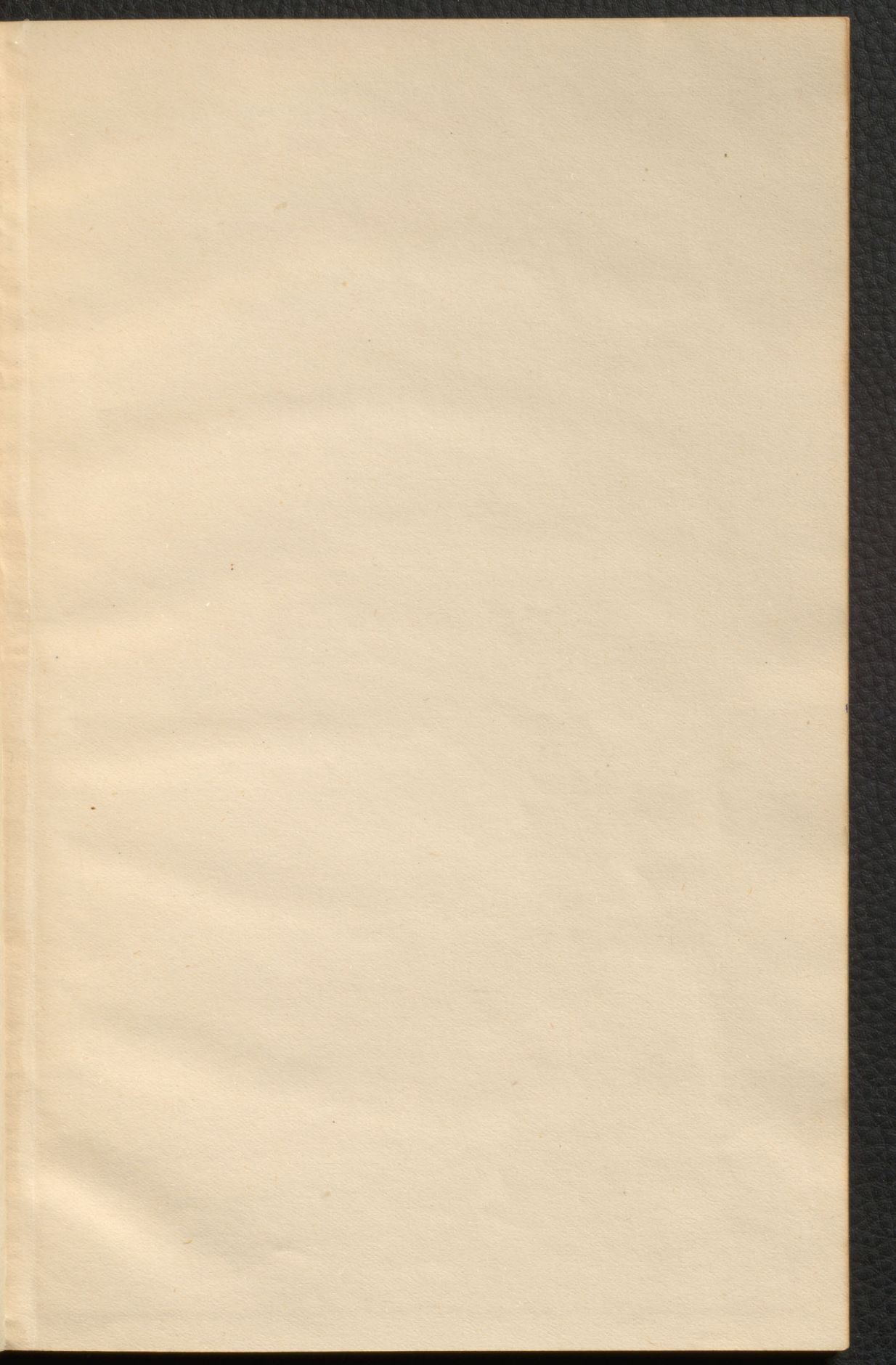
1895. A history of Bodysnatching . . . 1a. 8°. (Washington, 1916.)

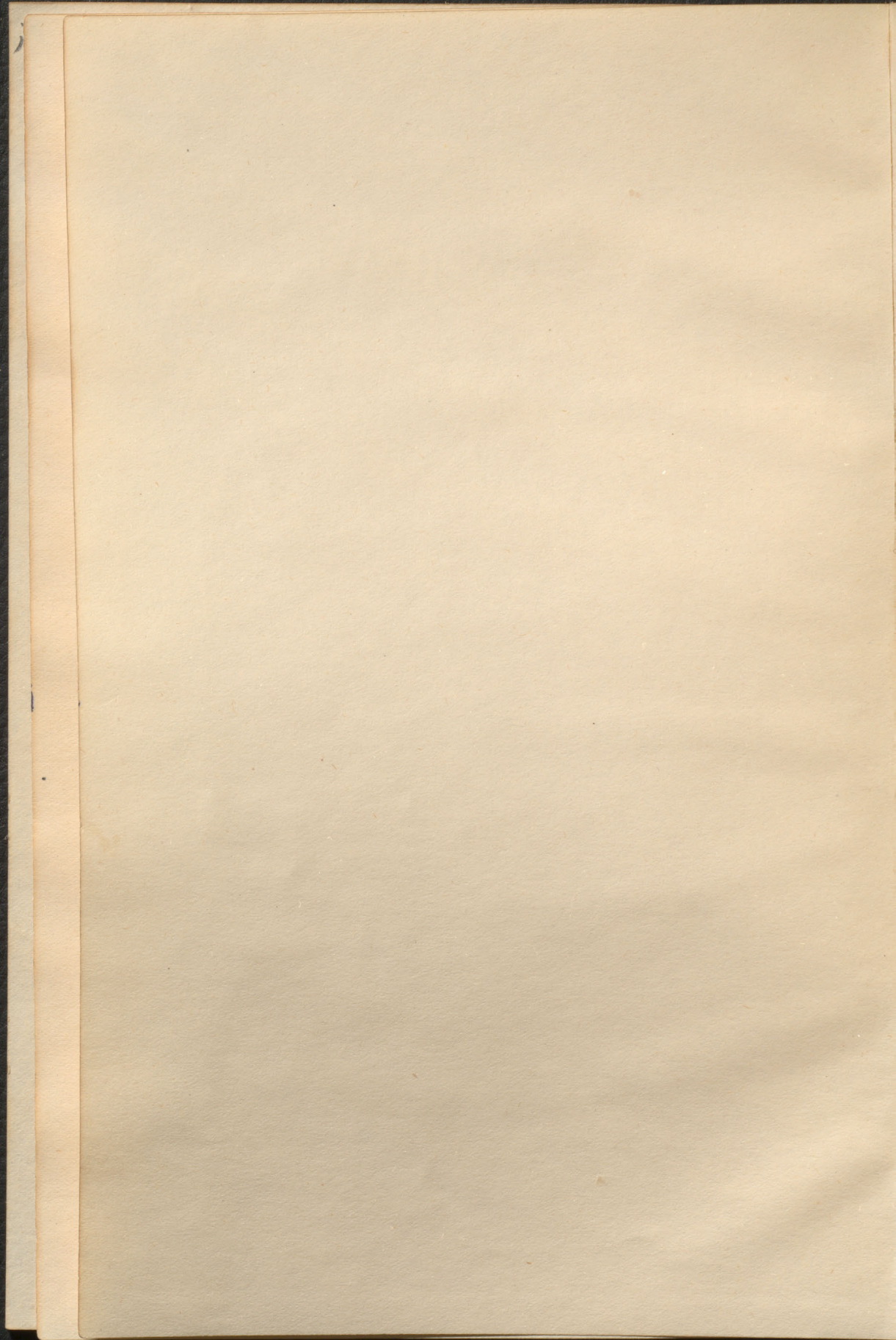
Discussion by J. Llewellyn Eliot of a paper by F. Baker; extr. fr. Washington Med. Annals, 1916, pp. 247-53.

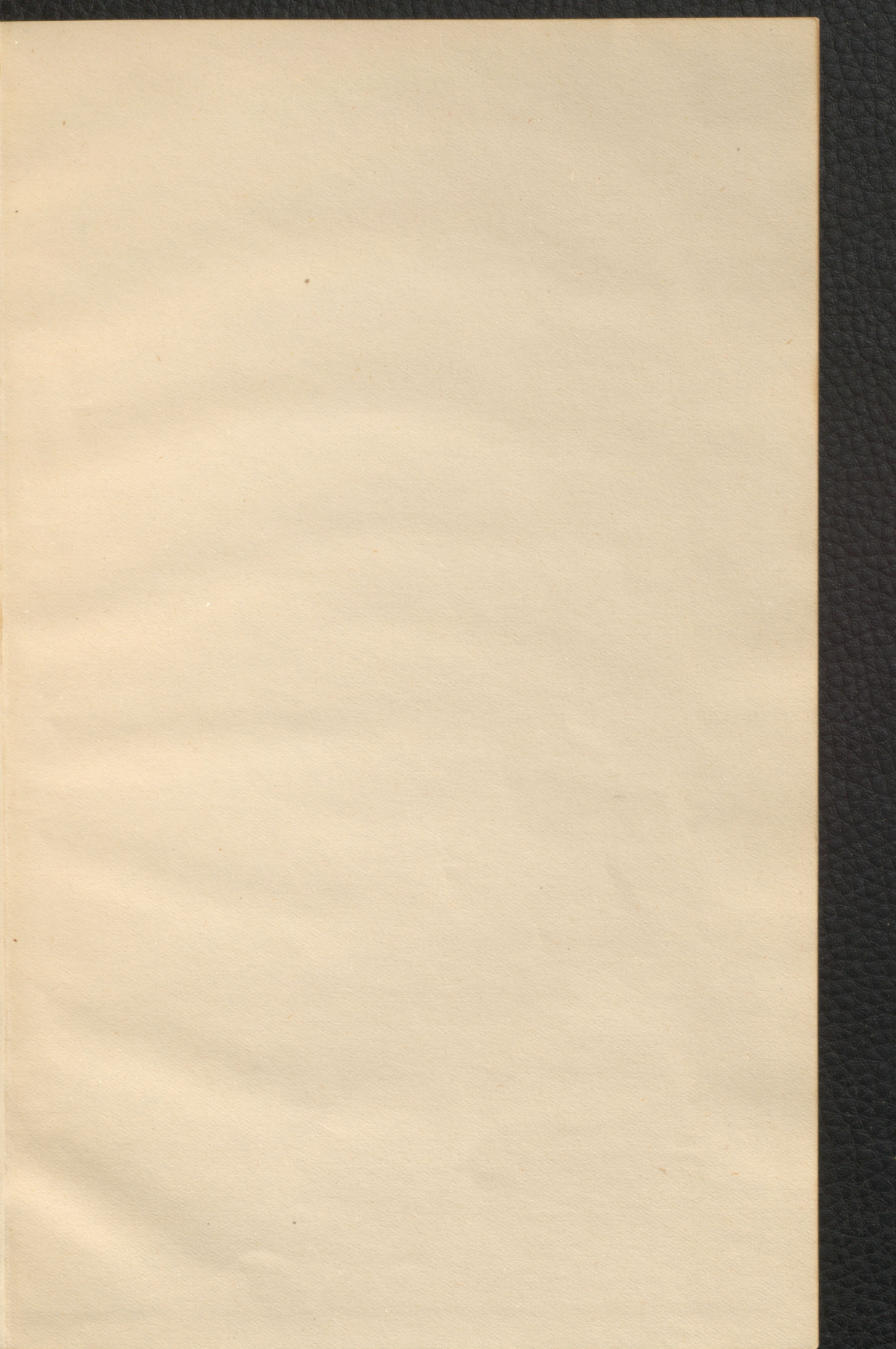
1895

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A HISTORY OF BODYSNATCHING.*

By FRANK BAKER, M. D.,

Washington, D. C.

Dr. Llewellyn Eliot discussed the paper as follows:

Bodysnatching, resurrecting, night doctors was a pastime in which I was deeply interested and at one time engaged. There were pleasures and fascinations and excitements and risks attending it that were not found in any other phase of the study of medicine; but the passage of the Anatomy Act, in April, 1902, put a partial stop to the game; I say a partial stop, for I believe that bodysnatching still continues, although to a limited extent and for the benefit of a select few.

Medical history records the names of many renowned and respected men who were compelled to steal bodies for legitimate purposes. In 1814 William Cheselden was reprimanded, and no one knew the secrets of the resurrection men better than Sir Astley Cooper.

As far back as 1540 a law was enacted in England allowing the Company of Barbers and Surgeons to have yearly the bodies of four criminals to dissect. The Warburton Anatomy Act in 1832 put a stop to the systematic bodysnatching.

In the early days bodysnatchers were men of the lowest type, murderers, criminals, desperate fellows, who did not hesitate a moment to take any sort of advantage of their opponents; theirs was a business of bread and butter.

I shall not discuss the history of bodysnatching in the earliest days of the game—Dr. Baker has done that—but will take up the game in modern times, and what I shall say will take us back a great many years; some things I shall draw from tradition, others will be gathered from experience.

We of the present day call bodysnatching a nefarious trade, that hummers, outcasts, derelicts only will engage in, but let me tell you there was never a greater injustice done to a legitimate business; for while there is honor among thieves, there were honor, bravery, generosity and friendship between rival demonstrators. In illustration of this, one night rival demonstrators met in a burying ground, out for the same body, and although strong personal friends they came nearly to shovel blows; when, however, the one proved his rights by priority of arrival, the other waived his claim to the stiff and assisted in the snatching. Another night, rivals scouted about a burying ground to get a body each had located during the funeral services earlier in the day; each party heard the other; each had visions of police

* Read at a joint meeting of the Medical Society and Medical History Club, Washington, May 17, 1916. Dr. Baker's MSS. has not been received for publication.

officers and station houses, and they sneaked out of the grounds ; but in about an hour they returned by different paths ; the first arrival was given all the assistance that time would permit.

My father was a bodysnatcher ; he was one by reason of his duties as Demonstrator, afterwards Professor of Anatomy. In 1844 he was under Dr. Thomas Miller, Professor of Anatomy in the Columbian Medical College, and he continued until 1849, when he became Professor of Anatomy in the Georgetown Medical Department. In 1861 he was transferred to the Chair of Surgery. Although the duties of bodysnatching were given to another he remained the friend and protector of the legitimate bodysnatcher until his death.

In the early days men went armed and were ready to call "Hands up !" "Which will you take ?" that is, a drink or a fight.

In 1856 one of the prominent practitioners of the city had a sister die ; he feared the resurrection men, so he begged that her body be left undisturbed.

When the Columbian Medical College was located in the old jail, the Demonstrator gently and quietly and carefully lifted the body of a brother Mason from its final resting place, and promptly entered it in the student class of anatomy. In some manner suspicion was aroused ; the Lodge ordered an investigation. The grave was reopened ; the committee found the clothing and other belongings in the coffin, but the brother had left for parts unknown. The chairman of the committee visited the Demonstrator and requested permission to make a search of the college ; this permission was freely granted. Immediately afterwards the Demonstrator hurried to the college, had a section of the flooring taken up, the body placed, and the flooring replaced. The committee arrived ; they were assured most positively that they would not find the body ; they searched into every place, but failed to find the body. They left, the flooring was again removed and the body carried to the dissecting table.

The keenest piece of body stealing that ever occurred in this city happened as follows :

A man had died of some peculiar disease ; both medical colleges wanted the body and the Superintendent of Washington Asylum knew it. He swore a mighty swear that neither should have it, and in order to carry out his swear had the body brought from the dead house and placed in his back office. Now, the dead house was a secure place, with windows barred, door locked and chained, almost impossible of burglarious entrance ; the body would have been safe there. He thought not. Shortly after dark two students called to spend the evening, for he was a good fellow ; in time more came down to see him. He felt complimented, and about ten o'clock went to the kitchen to order supper and other things prepared for his guests. At twelve o'clock the party broke up. But, while he was seeing to the

supper the body was lowered from the window into the arms of waiting students and carried away. Our old friend felt jubilant over his success and went to bed a happy and a contented man, but one can imagine his surprise and "what a difference in the morning."

Selden W. Crow got into trouble about 1859 and he was unable to make good after that. Sylvester went so far that he had to give up or get caught.

George A. Christian was a clerk in a Government office; he associated himself with a bad gang—Percy Brown and his sister Maude; Workhouse Kate and Margaret Harrison. They did a big and a profitable business. Away out on East Capitol Street, near the old Lincoln Hospital, this gang had a shanty, where they soon accumulated a great quantity of clothing, shrouds, and other graveyard things. It was a security storage until Christian suggested the medical college at 10th and E Streets as a better place for shipment. The suggestion was, in part, adopted. Christian would inject and pack the bodies in whiskey barrels at the college, roll these barrels up in front of the Army Medical Museum, where the express company would call for them; Christian was always on hand to pay charges and direct the shipments; in this way the company did not suspect the fraud. The price of bodies fluctuated with the demand and the weather. When the demand was great it was a common thing to charge one hundred dollars for a good subject; when the market became glutted the average price was forty dollars. Quite a number of Demonstrators paid a hundred dollars. Shipments were mostly to the South.

Christian was a man of medium build, athletic, strong-muscled, of great endurance, and a good worker in the cause; his hair and beard were black. His clothing was always that taken from the grave; he, therefore, was usually well dressed. His frequent raids and his sullenness when drinking were the causes of his undoing.

On the night of December 13, 1873, he was stopped in the street by Officer McGlue; with Christian were Margaret Harrison (white) and Charles Green (colored). They had been to Holmead's Cemetery and had a body. All hands were partially intoxicated; Christian refused to answer the questions McGlue put to him; he would give no explanation whatever, so the party was taken to the 4th precinct station house. The charges were: Carrying concealed weapons, disorderly conduct, suspicious character, and every imaginable thing. While they were at the station the Lieutenant sent Sergeant Kneas and Officer Hawkins to Holmead's, and there they found the body of Thomas Fletcher, that had been buried only the night before, dug up and enclosed in a sack. In the search of the prisoners there were found some chemicals, a syringe for injecting, a diary, Colt's service revolvers, and a card of membership to the Young Men's Christian Association made out in the name of George A. Christian.

The papers gave a full account of the arrest; the District Attorney charged Christian with robbing grave yards of dead bodies and disposing of them to medical colleges in different places throughout the country. Dr. George A. Otis recommended Christian's immediate dishonorable discharge from the Government service. This was approved and Christian was out of two jobs.

The diary captured showed much incriminating evidence. This diary was turned over to the Chief of Police and by him it was given to one of his Surgeons; it was censored and portions were given out for publication in the city papers. Many names of those who had been out with Christian were, for good and sufficient reasons, omitted. In the Police Court, Judge Snell imposed on him a fine of \$1,000.00 and one year in jail.

Among the entries were the admission, that he had engaged in the exhuming of the body of Beau Hickman and in its horrible mutilation, and that he had put the face and scalp near the steps of the main entrance of the Capitol Building; this piece of business was done in April, 1873, and created considerable excitement; he also made an entry that he had put the scalp and face of another body on one of the gate-posts of the same grounds.

I shall give a few extracts from his record:

January 3d, 1873. "On the 3d, B and C went out and got two cadavers tonight."

September 2d; he gives the names of several places visited during the night and then winds up with:—"It was a lovely moonlight night, and everything went off smoothly."

September 18th. "Called on Dr. ——— this morning, and he promised to let Dr. Schleimer and I furnish his college with material this winter at \$15 each—we to inject and remove it."

Christian had his own private troubles, for on "September 19. Jay Cooke & Co. suspended yesterday, and I was unfortunate enough to have some money in their hands. Went up to see about it today, but everything is closed and no information can be had."

September 20. "Got a permit from the Board of Health today to bury material from the dissecting-room of college."

Christian also confessed to being an abortionist in the following: October 4th. "Gave 'M' tincture of gentian compound to produce an abortion." A few days later he records his success.

Business was quite lively in December; work was heavy. Monday, December 1. Visited Potter's field; shipped two subjects in whiskey barrels to Virginia."

December 4th. "Visited Holmead's and Young Men's grounds and failed."

December 6. "Visited Ebenezer, Kate and I, and got subject."

December. "Visited Holmead's and Young Men's grounds and failed."

It would require too much time to give more extracts from this diary; enough has been quoted to allow one to form an idea of the amount of work done.

One of Christian's workers was appointed a ward physician, and the death rate of that ward soared very high for the good of the cause.

Percy Brown was a big fellow, a good fighter, and of a very ugly disposition when he was drinking. Maude Pratt was Percy's sister, or his common law wife, it was never known which; she was a very devil; she married a disreputable dentist just about the time he was dying. Maude was chief mourner at funerals; heavily veiled and decked out in the most sombre looking dress, weeping as though her heart were broken, Maude would accompany the family to the cemetery; she always wanted a few flowers from the coffin of the dead friend; she would by some unfortunate accident drop these flowers near the grave and then report progress. The position of the flowers usually showed the right grave. The last time I saw Maude she was but a shadow of her former self; she was a wreck and nearly blind.

There was a negro preacher; he taught salvation and repentance to the limit on Sundays, buried the dead of his congregation; but the strain on his nervous system was so great that he was compelled to let off steam by stealing the bodies he so faithfully buried.

The Superintendent of the Washington Asylum went out one night to catch the bodysnatchers. He had malice in his heart, but cowardice in his actions. He pinned on his shield, buckled on his revolver and club; then he lighted his lantern, and then, like old Diogenes, went in search of an honest man; that is, one who quietly give himself up for trespass on the Potter's Field. He might just as well have staid in doors.

Jansen appeared on the scene. Jansen was a dirty fellow, as dirty men go; he was bold, boastful, revengeful. He stole many bodies, kept a record of his doings, kept all letters he received, and showed them to anyone interested sufficiently to read them. I have had a big batch of them in my possession for weeks at a time.

In January, 1881, Charlie Shaw beat his sister so badly that she died under my care. Suspicion pointed to Charlie, and while he denied all knowledge of the affair, he was arrested after her death, convicted of her murder March 29, 1882, and executed by Warden Crocker Friday, January 19, 1883. During his stay in the jail he several times attempted suicide, and once set afire the bed of his cell mate. Shaw's body was not in the ground three hours before Jansen was digging for it. He took it to a medical college; he claimed he was not sufficiently well paid for it and

swore to get even. At three o'clock on Sunday morning, the 22d, he was arrested while trying to break in the college door. Colateral was forfeited. During the night of the 22d he engaged a hackman, Johnny Mack, at the old Baltimore and Ohio Depot ; he gave Johnny several drinks and they went to the college, got the body and proceeded to Columbian Medical College to sell it ; he failed ; they then went to Howard University, but Dr. Shadd would have nothing to do with Jansen. Daylight was at hand and Jansen was in a fix as to what to do with the body ; he quickly solved the problem so far as he was concerned by making his "get away," leaving poor Johnny in the lurch. More drunk than sober, Johnny drove to the Seventh Street station house, the legs and feet of Shaw dangling out of the hack window. Mack would not give Jansen away, he was willing to take his medicine, but Jansen told on himself while he was in John Shea's saloon down on Maryland Avenue near Third Street. He was boasting of what he had done "last night" and on several other nights ; this was heard by a colored man from the alley in the rear of Shea's ; he told the police officer on the beat, and Jansen was soon under arrest. When convicted, his remark was that he had "got into trouble for the stiff of a damned nigger." The court gave him one year in jail.

The body of Shaw was carried to the dead house at the Asylum, and Superintendent —— swore by all that was good and holy that no one would ever see Shaw again. The weather was bitter cold, the ground too hard for grave digging, so quite a number of coffins accumulated in the dead house. However, a few days afterward the right box was found, opened and the head stolen for a keepsake ; I had the skull in my possession a number of years when it disappeared. There was ice in the coffin and in the skull. The skull was taken to the Hospital office, placed in a box lined with plaster of paris, buried in sawdust, then the top of the box securely nailed on ; this box was not opened for six months, and during the entire time there was no odor ; at the time of opening it, the skin fell away, and the bones were perfectly clean and white.

The grave dug for Shaw about two weeks after his receipt at the dead house was shelved at the bottom and the coffin pushed under the shelf.

Beale came along, but he soon became scared of the work ; was afraid of the ghosts of the jail.

No cemetery was held sacred by the old-time bodysnatcher.

I shall not occupy your time nor try your patience much longer, but I will say I do not believe any law will ever stop bodysnatching, and that what Sir Astley Cooper said before a committee of the House of Commons : "There is no person, let his situation in life be what it may, whom, if I were disposed to dissect, I could not obtain. The law only enhances the price, and does not prevent exhumation," is only too true.

I shall not tell how to properly snatch a body, as it might end disastrously for some of the younger men, and then again "lead us not into temptation."

I would suggest the reading of Southey's poem, "The Surgeon's Warning," and Thomas Hood's "Mary's Ghost."

CASE OF TRAUMATIC FLAT FOOT CURED BY OPERATION.*

By W. P. CARR, M. D., F. A. C. S.,

Washington, D. C.

J. E. V., white, male, age 37, electrician; fell from a scaffold in March, 1910, crushing both heels. I first saw him two years afterwards. He walked with difficulty with the aid of two canes; was unable to work and suffered much pain in both feet if he walked more than a few hundred yards or stood on his feet. He was wearing steel arches in both shoes, made from plaster casts of his feet, and thought they helped him a little but not much. He was very anxious to have something radical done to relieve him.

On examination I found both feet unusually long and slender, weak and perfectly flat; when he stood there was absolutely no arch, and even when sitting, with no weight on his feet, a ruler laid along the sole touched every point from heel to toe. April 3, 1912, I operated. A curved incision three inches long was made behind the outer malleolus down to the os calcis, which was exposed on one side only by slight dissection, and divided between the ankle joint and attachment of the tendo Achilles, with my modified Wyeth's bone saw. I know no other instrument with which this could be easily done.

The divided posterior part of the os calcis was easily slipped downward three-fourths inch on the right foot, but on the left this could not be done until the tendo Achilles had been obliquely divided and lengthened. This was readily done through the original incision. The sawn bones were nailed in their new positions through a half inch incision over the heel, with wire nails $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long.

Improvement in the shape of the foot was at once noted. A very good arch was formed and a firm heel. Both feet were put up in plaster casts in position to increase the arch as much as possible. Primary union resulted. The casts were removed in four weeks. In six weeks the patient was allowed to walk and could do it better than before the operation. He continued to improve.

* Reported, and patient presented, to the Medical Society April 12, 1916.

Five months later the nails were removed under local anesthesia, by Dr. H. S. Lewis, because there was some tenderness caused by the pressure of the shoes on the ends of the nails. Some time later, the patient living two miles from his place of work, walked each way daily.

In December, 1912, he told me that he had walked the two miles, carrying a heavy load without discomfort. This was a traumatic case, but there would hardly be a weaker or more unfavorable foot for the operation, and there has been no sign of relapse after four years. I should now like to try it on a bad case of gradually-acquired *pes planus*. I think that the giving of a firm projecting heel, which takes the weight and pressure off the plantar nerves and other tissues, is the chief cause of the relief, and that this would apply equally to gradually-acquired cases. The operation is simple, leaves no scar on the weight-bearing surface of the foot, and can cause no trouble if infection is excluded.

[Recess taken to examine patient. The heels were found firm, arches good and scars scarcely perceptible.]

Dr. Snyder said that Dr. Carr was to be congratulated on this original operation; Dr. Snyder had never heard of any similar surgical procedure. The result in the case called for high commendation.

Dr. Carr felt rather proud of the case. The man had come to his office hobbling with the aid of two canes, but now walks and works comfortably. Both patient and surgeon are pleased with the result.

INDICANURIA; STUDY OF 100 CONSECUTIVE CASES.—ABSTRACT.*

By J. RUSSELL VERBRYCKE, JR., M. D.,

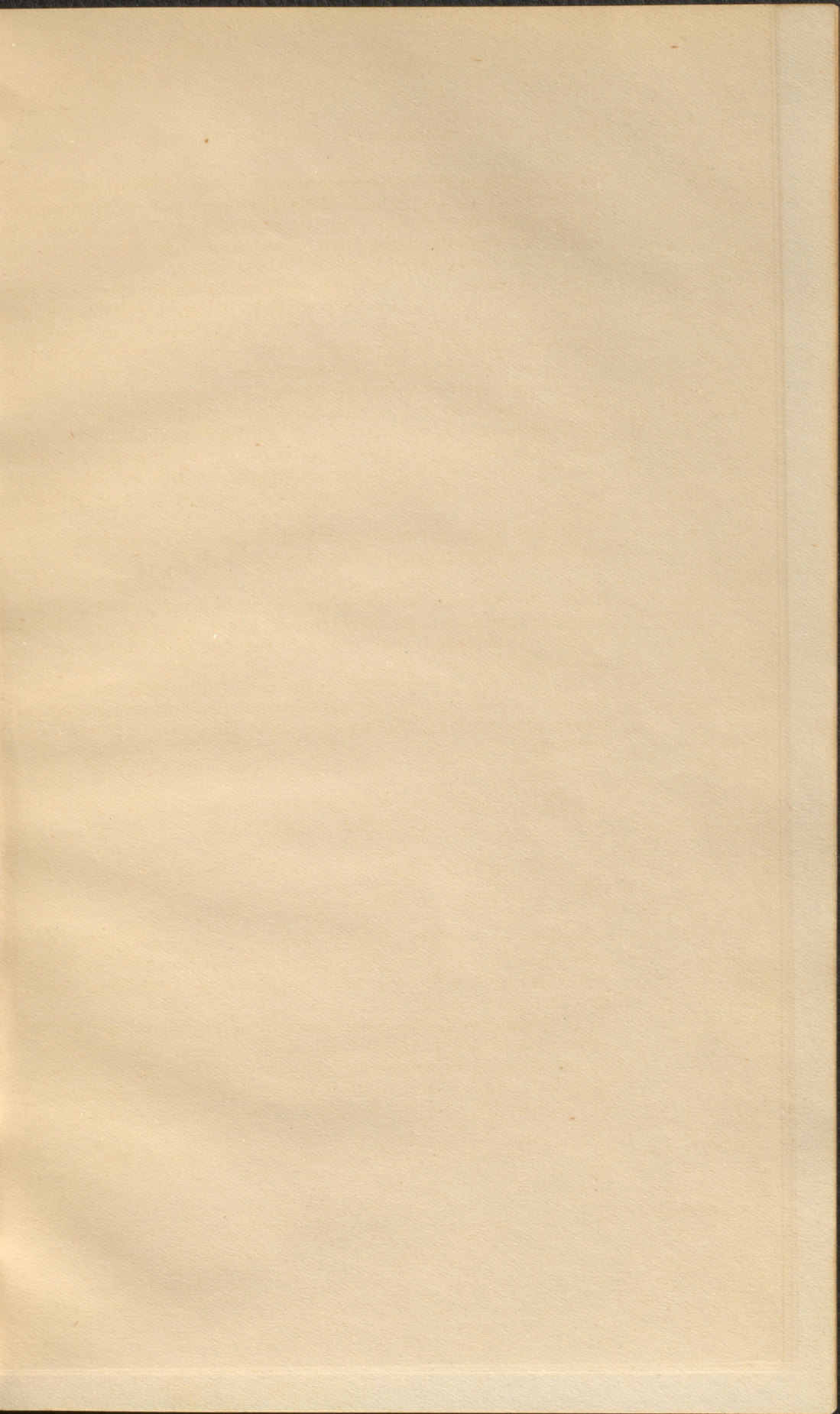
Washington, D. C.

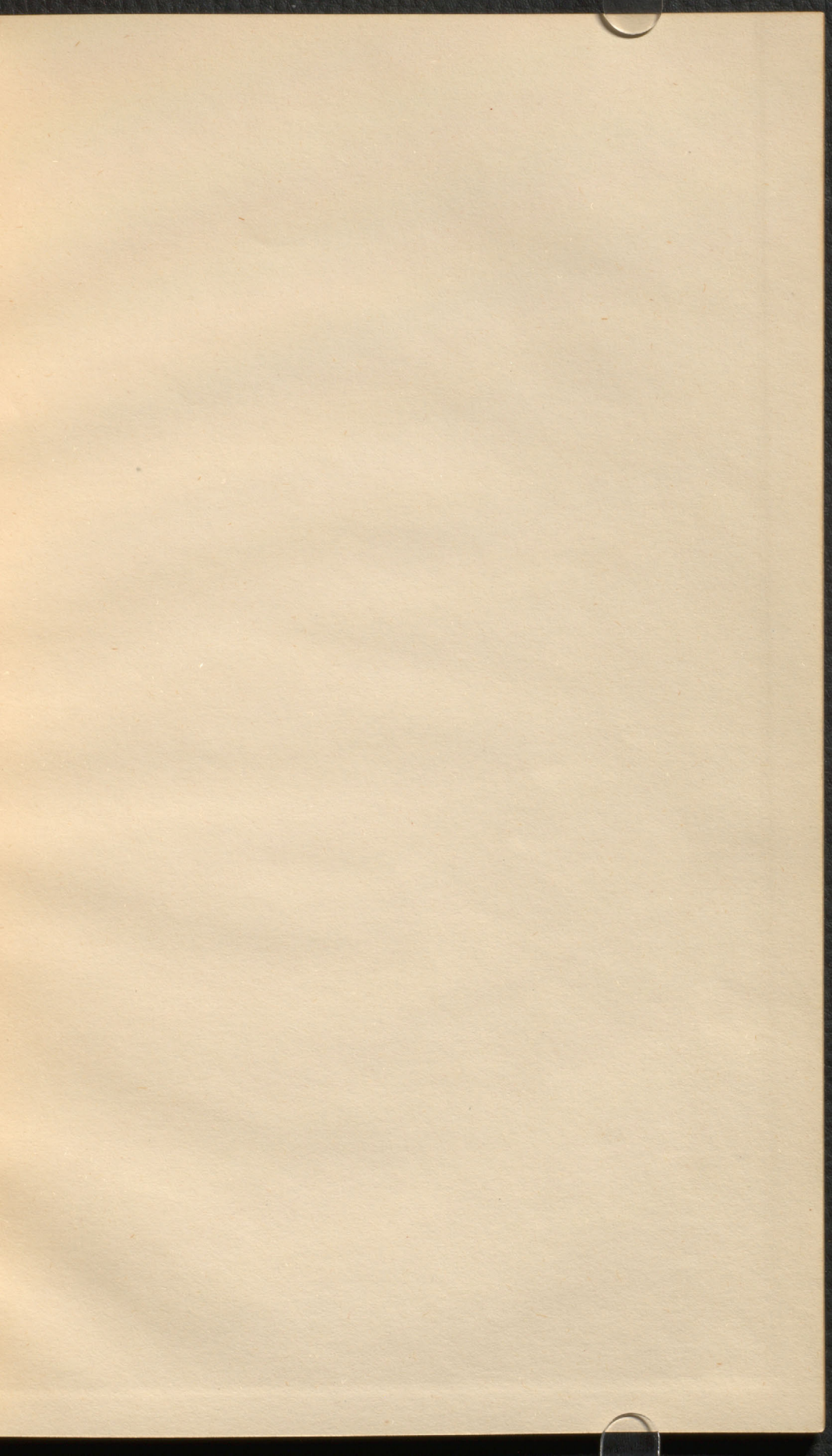
Indican as a fairly accurate index of auto-intoxication is of very great importance. The analysis of the hundred cases illustrates points which have been noted by the author in several hundred other cases.

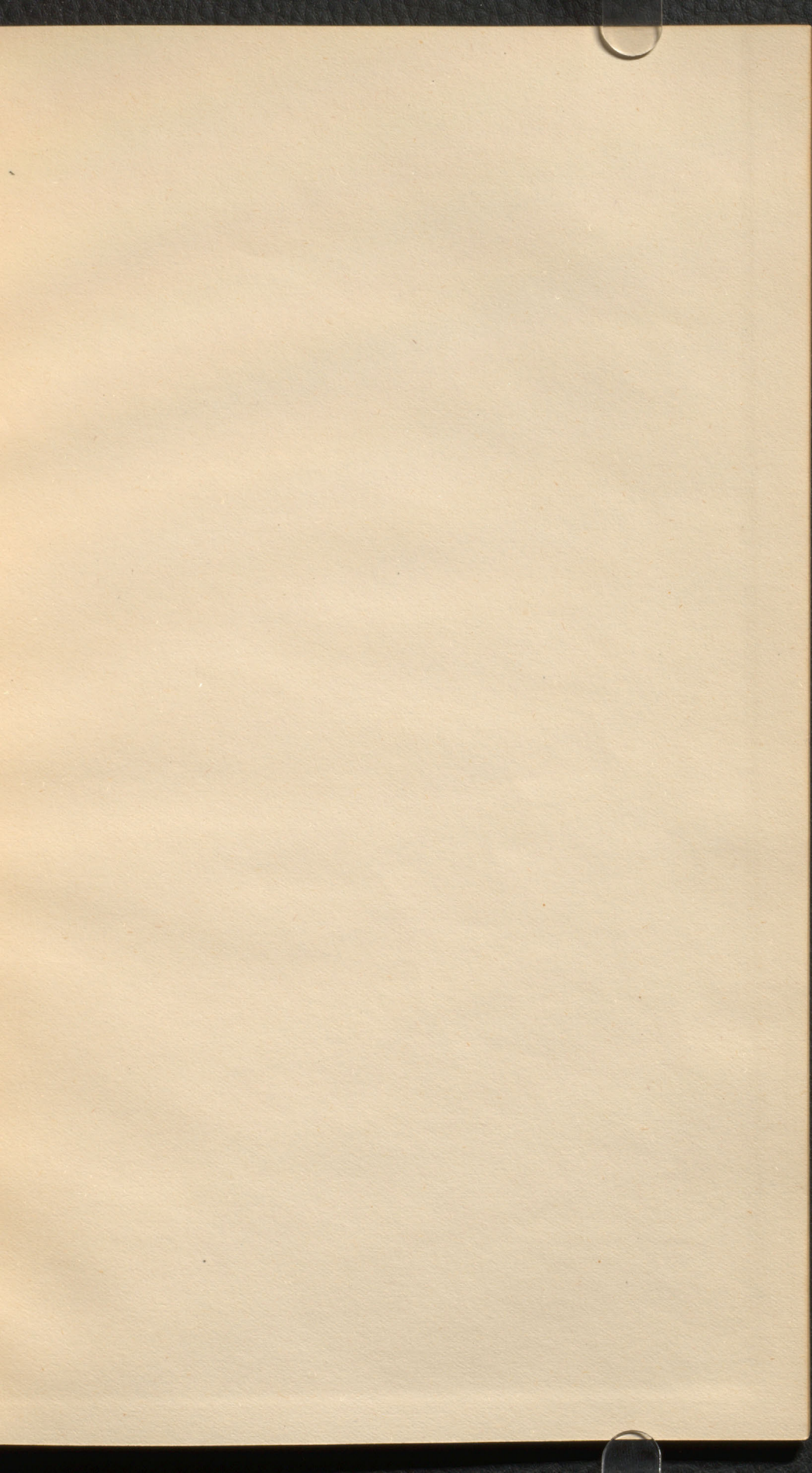
In 24 patients the condition was probably primary, in 69 it was clearly secondary, while in 7 this point could not be determined. In the series were represented 26 cases of ulcer, 23 of colitis or pericolicitis, 12 of visceroptosis, 9 of appendiceal dyspepsia, 5 of cholecystitis and 2 of cancer. These lesions when present

*Read before the joint meeting of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia and the Baltimore Medical Society, April 7, 1916, in Baltimore, Md.

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